Information Bill Signed By Johnson

President Hails It But Asserts Some Curbs Still Apply

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SAN ANTONIO, Tex., July 4—President Johnson signed today the so-called freedom of information bill that gives citizens a clearer right to obtain pertinent information from the Government.

In a statement, the President hailed the intent of the legislation but made it clear he believes certain restrictions not specifically enumerated in the measure still apply.

The age-old question of protecting the citizens' right to information as well as the national security is somewhat more precisely defined but not resolved, the President seemed to be saying.

Exceptions Specified

The legislation provides that a citizen may insist on seeing records held by the Federal Government — with specified exceptions — which he believes he has a right to see.

If officials refuse to provide the information, the citizen may sue in a Federal court. The burden of proof rests on the Government to demonstrate that the information sought is exempt from the general rule that all information is available.

The exemptions include national security information, trade and other commercial information which the Government obtains from private sources, personnel and medical records of Federal employes and correspondence between officials.

Effective in a Year

The bill becomes effective a year from today.

It ended a ten-year bipartisan effort to open Government files to public view. Officials in the Executive Branch had objected to the bill on grounds that it would lead to administrative chaos and could cause disclosure of information harmful to the national interest.

"No one should be able to pull curtains of secrecy around decisions which can be revealed without injury to the public interest," the President said in signing the bill.

"At the same time, the welfare of the Nation or the

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rights of individuals may require that some documents be made available."

There must be military secrets as long as there is a threat to the peace, the President said, and a citizen "must be able in confidence to complain to his Government and to provide information, just as he is—and should be—free to confide in the press without fear of reprisal or of being required to reveal or discuss his sources," he said.

(Although some states have laws providing for press confidentiality, the right has not been legally established Nationwide. In Oregon recently, a coed on a college newspaper was fined $300 for refusing to name her sources for a story about marijuana smoking on campus.)

Officials must be able to communicate with one another in confidence, the President said. They cannot operate effectively if they are forced to disclose information prematurely "or to make public investigative files and internal instructions that guide them in arriving at their decisions," he said.

"I know that the sponsors of this bill recognize these important interests and intend to provide for both the need of the public for access to information and the need of Government to protect certain categories of information," the President said.

"Moreover, this bill in no way impairs the President's power under our Constitution to provide for confidentiality when the national interest so requires."

Mr. Johnson said that he did not agree with those who believed that the language of the easure "will be construed in such a way as to impair Government operations."

"I have always believed that freedom of information is so vital that only the national security, not the desire of public officials or private citizens, should determine when it must be restricted," he said.

The President said he signed the measure "with a deep sense of pride that the United States is an open society in which the people's right to know is cherished and guarded."

Mr. Johnson also signed H.R. 10721, which amends the Federal Employes Compensation Act to raise the ceiling on disability survivors benefits and to provide for adjustments of awards based on cost of living changes.

The amendments are "the most significant improvement in the law in nearly 20 years," the President said, and will provide "expanded benefits for Federal employes who are disabled in the line of duty."

Mr. Johnson also signed a bank holding company bill that requires the multimillion-dollar Alfred I. duPont estate in Florida to be split up within three years and requires the breakup of Financial General Corp. of Washington, a registree investment firm, within 12 years.

Other legislation signed by the President included a bill reassigning to the Secretary of Interior the authority formerly held by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in administering Federal activities in dealing with water pollution and a bill making it illegal for Americans who are registered agents of foreign governments to contribute to U.S. political parties on behalf of their foreign employers.

In other action, the President directed John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, to establish a special task force on handicapped children and child development.

The task force, which will be named later by Gardner, will review programs and make recommendations for legislation in the next Congress.

The President said more comprehensive health and education programs for children are needed to prevent "failures" among our children.

The President spent the Fourth at his ranch with Mrs. Johnson, their daughter Luci, and her fiance, Pat Nugent.